

THE NEW YORK WEEKLY HERALD.

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CHRISTMAS.

ANCIENT USAGES ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Preparations for the Observance of the Anniversary in This City.

Inauguration Ceremonies of Last Night and This Morning.

Impressive Midnight Services at St. Alban's Church.

ENTERTAINMENT AT BELLEVUE HOSPITAL

The Festivities and Amusements of the Day and Evening.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL.

Ancient Usages on Christmas Eve.

ITS OBSERVANCE IN NEW YORK MIDNIGHT SERVICES.

Christmas eve used to be a great day in all Christendom; a day devoted to mirth and jollity, fun and frolic, and ushering in the world's festival. In England, more especially, it was wont to be celebrated with royal pomp, and gamest minds made merry all the day. In fact, the veritable festival itself was not so much honored as its harbinger. The bearing in of the huge "yule log" to the castle court inaugurated the day, and as its blazing sparks caused a ruddy glow to flash on the faces of all, the festive hour was spent and all attacked the "brawn," the boar's head decked with bay and rosemary, and the roasted ox, with appetites sharpened by the frosty air.

Then, "The wassail round in good brown bowls, garnished with ribbons blithely trolly," and drinking of the joy inspiring liquid all became inspirited and the merry laugh and jocular jest resounded through the hall.

"Then came the merry maskers in, and carols roared with brioche din; if unattended they were long, it was a hearty note and strong. Who lists may in their mummery see traces of ancient mystery."

So soon as the village chimps proclaim the hour of midnight the carol singers commence their peregrinations, and the gray eye of Christmas morning still sees them at their labor. This last custom, and one of the time honored usages of antiquity, prevail to this day all over England. From the first sleep of night one is awakened by the sound of sweet strains of music and simple melodies wishing one a Happy Christmas and recalling the heavenly message promulgated so long since of "Peace on earth, good will towards men."

The bells, too, ring out a merry peal, proclaiming that the joyous festival of Christmas has again returned. In America these customs have fallen into disuse, if, indeed, they ever existed. Having no ancient customs of her own, Columbia cares not to borrow those of other countries, and, losing nothing by this determination, her children enjoy their Christmas as heartily as those of any nation. It is not unlikely that were our hardworking citizens disturbed in their slumbers by the sound of Christmas carols, however sweet, the performers would receive other than a blessing as the sleeper waked up, and the "wails" would assuredly have to establish the correctness of their cognomen as they would receive any large.

MIDNIGHT SERVICES AND MASSES.

All over the Continent of Europe, and more especially in Roman Catholic countries, the custom of ringing a merry peal upon the church bells at midnight, and solemnizing mass prevail.

On Christmas Eve the bells were rung, on Christmas Eve the mass was sung; that only night in all the year when the church bells were rung, and the mass was sung.

In Italy, France and Germany this custom is never dispensed with, and the ceremonies are usually of the most imposing character. In Ireland, too, almost all the convents have a midnight mass on Christmas eve, and the soft strains of the organ and sweet voices of the spotless devotees harmonize together in a song of praise and thanksgiving to God. In England this custom, strangely enough, exists only in two places. At Cranborne Abbey, in Dorsetshire, is one of these. Formerly, when in the possession of the monks, a grant of land was made it for the purpose of paying for the chanting of masses on Christmas eve. The abbey still exists, but has passed into the hands of the Episcopal Church, and the grant, too, has not been renewed. Each Christmas eve at midnight the cathedral choir on the battlements of the abbey chant a number of Anglican hymns, by which means the grant of land, now very valuable, is retained.

MIDNIGHT SERVICE AT ST. ALBAN'S CHURCH.

A service of an imposing and with peculiar character was solemnized at midnight at the Protestant Episcopal Church of St. Alban's, seventy-seventh street and Lexington avenue. In England, for some time past, what is called Puseyism has been creeping into the Established Church. This looked upon by the members of the original Protestant Church as a heretical innovation, and only one step removed from Roman Catholicism. Disturbances in churches into which it has crept are not unusual. Instances those at St. George's in the East, where the greater portion of the congregation would not permit the service to proceed for several weeks in consequence of the Puseyism introduced. This has kept away from America for a long time, but now is in existence, the church in Forty-seventh street being probably the precursor of many others of a similar kind. A large congregation was present at the service referred to, the handsome edifice being quite filled. The church was tastefully ornamented with evergreens and the chancel decorated with flowers. The altar cloth was of scarlet, and on top, with a draping of white satin, on the front of which a representation of a cross was prominent. On the altar itself there was in the center a large lighted cross, and on either side a vase of flowers. In the center of the altar, a number of black candles, each about the size of a candle, were placed, and on each side, while at each extremity of the altar a candelabra, full of burning candles, was placed. A number of evergreens in flower pots were placed at the sides of the altar. Altogether the appearance, though tasteful in the extreme, seemed strange as in a church where all desire for display is ignored and empty forms as little attended to as possible.

So soon as the chiming told midnight a soft strain of melody, from unseen singers, stole into the church, as if angels were rejecting over the birth of a Saviour. This continued for a short time, when the doors of the vestry opened and a number of young ladies, dressed as angels, entered the altar. They were preceded by an individual, dressed in a long robe of black serge, after the manner of the old monks. He wore no collar, and the robe was gathered round the waist by a black cord. The hands of the acolythine chorists were clasped as in prayer. There were six of them. After these came four supplied gentlemen, who carried the candles. Then came a small acolythine supporting a large wooden cross entwined with ivy. After him came the choir, consisting of a number of young men, who sang hymns in English, the congregation the time returned to the altar, where the chorists filed in, to seats at either side, while the three officiating clergymen walked up to the altar and made the sign of the cross. The service was then continued, the hands of the acolythine chorists were clasped as in prayer. The service was then continued, the hands of the acolythine chorists were clasped as in prayer.

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